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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT
FOR HIS MEETING WITH JACK SPITZER,
PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF B'NAI B'RITH

I. INTRODUCTION

Jack Spitzer, President of the International Organization of the B'nai B'rith will be travelling to Buenos Aires for a meeting of the international and local organizations of the B'nai B'rith, October 23 through 27. Arrangements are being made for Mr. Spitzer to meet with officers in our Embassy in Buenos Aires during his stay there. The B'nai B'rith has been active and interested in the human rights situation in Argentina and in individual cases of high general interest.

II. SETTING

Approximately two percent of the Argentine population is Jewish; the majority are the children and grandchildren of Eastern European immigrants who arrived in the latter part of the nineteenth century and between 1919-1930. The city of Buenos Aires has the fourth largest Jewish community in the world and the largest concentration of members of the Jewish faith in Latin America. They play important roles in the economic, cultural, and political life of the country.

There have been reports of anti-Semitism in Argentina and, in Argentina's campaign against terrorism, there have been widespread violations of human rights, some prominent victims of which have been Jewish. However, the Argentine government is on record as opposing anti-Semitism, and specific legislation has been passed that makes the incitement of racial hatred or violence a punishable offense. Jewish residents are free to enter the universities and professions, to travel and invest freely, and to practice openly their religion.

The Argentine Constitution of 1853 guarantees religious freedom, although it establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion and requires that the President and Vice President be Roman Catholic. Through most of Argentina's history, religious instruction in the public schools

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release () Excise () Deny

Exemption(s): _____

Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full

() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to _____

Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

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has been prohibited. However, in February 1979, the current military government imposed mandatory Catholic religious education in the secondary schools in the form of a "moral and civic education" course given to first-year high school students. This requirement has been widely criticized in the Argentine press, and some members of the Argentine Jewish community have advocated a boycott of these classes.

Following two and a half years of arrest, the prominent Jewish editor of one of Buenos Aires' most respected dailies, La Opinion, was stripped of his Argentine citizenship and deported to Israel on September 25, 1979. His release, which followed intense lobbying by human rights organizations and numerous representations by the U.S. government, created deep divisions within the Argentine leadership. Although the Supreme Court had directed the GOA to release Timerman, most of the Army's major generals apparently felt Timerman had financial connections with the Montonero terrorist organization. It reportedly took the threatened resignations of President Videla, the Minister of Justice, and all five members of Argentina's Supreme Court to effect Timerman's release.

With the release of Jacobo Timerman, the continued detention of Jaime Lokman has received increased attention from various human rights organizations, including the B'nai B'rith. Mr. Lokman is being held under executive power and, according to the Argentine Embassy, is charged with indoctrinating youth on behalf of the Montonero terrorist organization and acting as financial agent for the "Comandos Revolucionarios" terrorist group. His case is of concern because he is a Jew under arbitrary arrest in a country where allegations of anti-Semitism are often made, and because of his failing health. The widespread interest in Mr. Lokman's case has been made known to the Argentine government by our Embassy in Buenos Aires and the Department of State.

III. TALKING POINTS

--I was pleased to learn of Jacobo Timerman's release and that he has been allowed to join his family in Israel. However, we are disappointed at his loss of Argentine citizenship and regret that he had to endure prison and detention for two and a half years before his release.

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--We have communicated the widespread interest in Mr. Lokman's well-being to the Argentine government and will continue to encourage a favorable outcome in his case. We have been informed that Mr. Lokman is receiving adequate treatment for his serious heart condition.

--We are aware of the recent government ruling requiring that a mandatory moral and civic education course be taught in high school and that the course has some religious content. For the past 25 years Argentina has refrained from imposing religious instruction in its schools, and I hope that this tradition will soon be resumed.

--Regarding reports of anti-Semitism in Argentina, Ambassador Castro continues to raise this issue with high-level Argentine officials. We will continue to express to Argentine leaders our concern for complete religious freedom.

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